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NEWS RELEASE

DON'T LET THE HOLIDAYS GET YOU DOWN: UD COUNSELOR OFFERS TIPS FOR ENJOYING THE SEASON

DAYTON, Ohio — High expectations for the yuletide season can lead to a “blue” Christmas, says a clinical counselor from the University of Dayton.

“Some people are very passionate about what the holidays mean to them,” said Scott Hall, an assistant professor of counselor education and human services at UD’s School of Education and Allied Professions.

“There are generally two schools of thought,” he said. “Some people see the holiday season as a Currier and Ives type-event where it’s very jolly, very connected with family and where everything is going to turn out perfectly. Others look at the holidays as a freight train coming at them,” said Hall, who also has a private counseling practice.

Both situations can lead to frustration, Hall said.

If the sisters get into a fight, the green bean casserole gets burnt or an uncle doesn’t show up as promised — some people think the holiday has been spoiled, Hall said. “We expect certain outcomes and if they don’t happen, we can be shattered,” he said.

Many people form their holiday expectations from watching commercials, television shows and movies, Hall said. “You know those commercials that bring a tear to your eye, where it’s snowy and everyone is home Those images plant a seed of how it ‘should be’ and that’s where we get in trouble. It puts an absolute on our expectations,” he said.

Past experiences also play a role in how people handle the holidays. “If we had wonderful Christmases before, we want that to be replicated. Or, if we had past experiences that were not good, we go into the holidays with the assumption that it will be like it was,”

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Hall said.

For some people, the New Year's holiday creates anxieties about the uncertainty of their future. Setting New Year's resolutions also places an emphasis on self evaluation — reviewing past accomplishments and failures. "Resolutions give us a feeling for a moment that we're going to make a change in our life," Hall said. "In actuality, very people follow through or even begin to make a change," he said.

Hall anticipates that entering the new millennium will add to the holiday pressure for many people this year. "Simply by writing the year with a 2-0 instead of 1-9, as we have done all our lives, we are defining our own existence differently," he said.

Hall offers several suggestions for coping with the upcoming holidays.

- Accept the reality that the holidays may not match up to your expectations. "Realize and accept the fact that that person may not like the gift you picked out," he said.
- Enjoy the holidays moment by moment. "Chances are, if you have a couple of bad moments disagreeing with a relative, that the next 10 or 20 minutes will be just fine," Hall said.
- Be forgiving. "If the holidays aren't turning out as expected, try to look at the situation from a positive point of view. Choose to have fun."
- Don't fear change in tradition. "Doing something a little differently this year doesn't mean that you are shattering traditions or rituals," Hall said. He encourages families to try something new each year.
- Avoid confrontations. Hall discourages people from using the holidays as a time to reveal secrets or unload problems with relatives.
- Simplify gift giving. Hall recommends sending photographs in place of handwritten cards, drawing names instead of buying for everyone in a family, purchasing gift certificates and shopping on the Internet.
- Take advantage of free activities. "Drive around and look at the lights. There are lots of things to do that don't require money," he said.
- Follow your heart. "So many times we rely on external pressures to make a decision or evaluate a situation, when we really have the answer inside of us the whole time."

For media interviews, call **Scott Hall** at (937) 229-3607. For more information, call **Erika Mattingly** at (937) 229-3212.